

## Kierkegaard and Nietzsche on the Problem of *Werden*

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Briefly, the term *Werden* means the clarification of self, the resolution of one's inner contradictions, and the attainment of true identity. In this paper I have taken up the problem of *Werden* from the standpoint of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche's views of *Wahrhaftigkeit* (sincerity), a matter closely related to the problem of *Werden*. These two philosophers, though contemporaries, held quite differing views on this subject.

Nietzsche's position can be summed up in the phrase, "*Bleibt der Erde treu.*" (Be truthful to the Earth.) Nietzsche derived this idea from the spiritual tradition prevailing in Europe since the Renaissance which emphasized the dominance of the intellect over the spirit and which resulted in the tide of *Entgötterung* (secularization, loss of divinity, or, in Nietzsche's own term, "the Death of God"). He looked upon this situation as the spiritual fruit of Europe's 2,000 year history, and placed the greatest blame on Christianity and the traditional metaphysical system with its dualistic structure of the *Hinterwelt* (the world behind) and the phenomenal world. Focussing his criticism on this dualistic system, he held that the world behind (the world of transcendent being) and the phenomenal world (the world of becoming) are fundamentally incompatible with each other, and the former world, if anything, leads man to

delusion. He seems to have had some understanding of Buddhism (and of Indian philosophy as a whole), but it is unclear as to what his term *jenseits* (the other shore) was meant to indicate, unable as he was to detach himself from the dualistic world of *noumena* and *phenomena* in his discussion of *Werden*. What kind of aspiration or basic orientation did he, as a man in the midst of a God-less nihilism, have with regard to the “Will to Power” (*Wille zur Macht*), a term which originally indicated a Dionysian creative force, but which Nietzsche viewed as a means of transcending nihilism? Further consideration of points such as these would lead us to a deeper understanding of the phrase “Be truthful to the Earth,” an expression which has its origins in Greek mythology. In any event, it is highly significant that Nietzsche’s philosophy of nihilism proved to be the most penetrating insight into the nature of the times in which he lived, and thereby moved his contemporaries to ask anew this profound question regarding the ground of existence of their lives.

Kierkegaard, on the other hand, tried to understand the significance of “sincerity” from the standpoint of man’s firm maintenance of his basic nature as a temporal, limited, and constantly changing existence living in dependence on God. In this position man, regardless of what befalls him, listens to the word of God, and attempts to coordinate his life through living by what God dictates. The main theme of Kierkegaard’s writings (such as *Über den Begriff der Ironie*, his dissertation for Magistrate) was the problem of dialogue which had its origins, for him, in his broken marriage engagement with Regine Olsen. What always underlies Kierkegaard’s “dialogue” was his listening to the word of God.

His "listening" involved an aspect of great profundity, one that was free even from the consciousness of listening. This spiritual stance of listening to the other's heart (word) forms the basis for his existential *Werden*. Kierkegaard's uncertainty, his doubt and despair (*Verzweiflung*) were all concerned with this act of listening, and in it is indicated the nature of the contact between the temporal and eternal. Kierkegaard thus uncovered the unfathomable sinfulness of his own existence through this act of "listening." The fact that we tend to overlook the sinful nature of our existence provides an indication, perhaps, of the significance of Nietzsche's insight into nihilism.

Our attention is naturally drawn to the differences in the way these two philosophers resolved the problem of life-and-death. However, modern man's way of life, in which he has lost sight of his own sinfulness and basic ignorance, could hardly be said to be a lifestyle in full touch with his true existence. As such, we might say that the problem of nihilism as presented by Nietzsche is an indication of the spiritual situation of modern man.